Web Buyer

Cheap Musical Thrills

Still stuck in a post-Napster funk? Lend an ear to these sites for inexpensive—and sometimes free—digital music.

BY KEVIN SAVETZ

Disclaimer: *This article discusses a topic that some readers might find distasteful—paying for digital music. Those who are offended by the idea of shelling out real money for musical entertainment should turn the page now.*

Sure, grabbing gratis music with Napster was great, but like many things in life, it was too good to last. Besides, those "stolen" MP3 files we enjoyed so freely were often riddled with annoying audio glitches and potentially negative karmic baggage.

Yes, free alternatives to Napster have cropped up (more on that later), but you can also find some great sources for legitimate—official, affordable, and guilt-free—digital-audio files. With an open mind (and wallet) you can download "nice 'n' legal" digital tunes. Plus, the free ride isn't completely over, as most of these sites offer complimentary tunes in addition to pay-for-play.

Start by pointing your browser to **MP3.com** ***(www.mp3.com)***. The free arm of the site offers a million songs that you can listen to online. Most of the bands you'll find here are unsigned (that's industry code for "never heard of 'em"), but the site's popularity charts will help you weed out the dreck. If you like what you hear, you can pay to download an entire album. Pony up three bucks a month for the subscription service, and you can download those songs to your portable player and burn your favorites to custom CDs.

Sonicnet.com ***(www.sonicnet.com)***, part of the company that owns a little station called MTV, is more likely to serve up music from the bands you (or, at least, your kids) have heard of. The site's MP3 section offers a respectable selection from popular artists. Pay to download an entire album, or snag selected sample tracks for free.

EMusic.com ***(www.emusic.com)*** is another subscription service that will let you download all the music your ears can handle. For $14.99 a month ($9.99 a month if you sign up for a year), it provides access to over 180,000 songs from 8,000 artists ranging from Louis Armstrong to Frank Zappa.

Still hungry for even more music? **Artist-Direct's** ***(listen.artistdirect.com)*** free MP3 page is a huge plate of aural hors d'oeuvres. Nosh on sample songs from popular artists, then if you crave a full serving, the site will sell you the CD. **Liquid Audio** ***(www.liquid.com)*** pours on the tunes in genres from rap to reggae, but many of these are in a proprietary format that requires a special player.

Don't feel left out if these sites skip over your favorite style of music. A variety of niche sites specialize in particular genres. Check out **Insound** ***(www.insound.com)*** for garage, underground, and punk; **DownBeat.com** ***(www.downbeat.com)*** for jazz notes; **eClassical.com** ***(www.eclassical.com)*** for the classics; **Technomusic.com** ***(www.technomusic.com)*** for synth goodness; or **Rapstation.com** ***(www.rapstation.com)*** for a dose of hard-core rhymes.

For times when you can't bury your nose in a book—while driving, for instance—spoken-word audio can be a great way to keep yourself entertained. The selection at **Audible.com** ***(www.audible.com)*** includes popular books, current magazines, and newspapers. You can enjoy exclusive content, such as wacky commentary from Robin Williams, or catch up with news in *The Wall Street Journal* without getting newsprint on your fingers. The site offers some free content, but deals mostly in pay subscriptions to regularly updated periodicals and one-time flat-fee book or novel downloads.

A custom CD can make a truly unique gift. **CDnow** ***(www.cdnow.com)*** enables you to woo your sweetie with your own mix of love songs or golden oldies, even if you don't have a CD burner. The site is stocked with more than 10,000 tunes, but be sure to know what you want—there's no search engine and you can't mix songs from different musical genres.

So now you know plenty of ways to get music online legally and inexpensively. But for those who still believe copyright infringement adds a little excitement to tracking down those digital tunes, yes, you *can* still find plenty of free MP3s. **Aimster** ***(www.aimster.com)***, **BearShare** ***(www.bearshare.com)***, **Gnotella** ***(www.gnotella.com)***, **Lime Wire** ***(www.limewire.com)***, and **Morpheus** ***(www.musiccity.com)*** are just a few thriving peer-to-peer tools that can help you snag free online music as well as images, movies, and other types of media files. But note that if your digital-music thievery drives you mad with remorse, we cannot accept liability. ▼

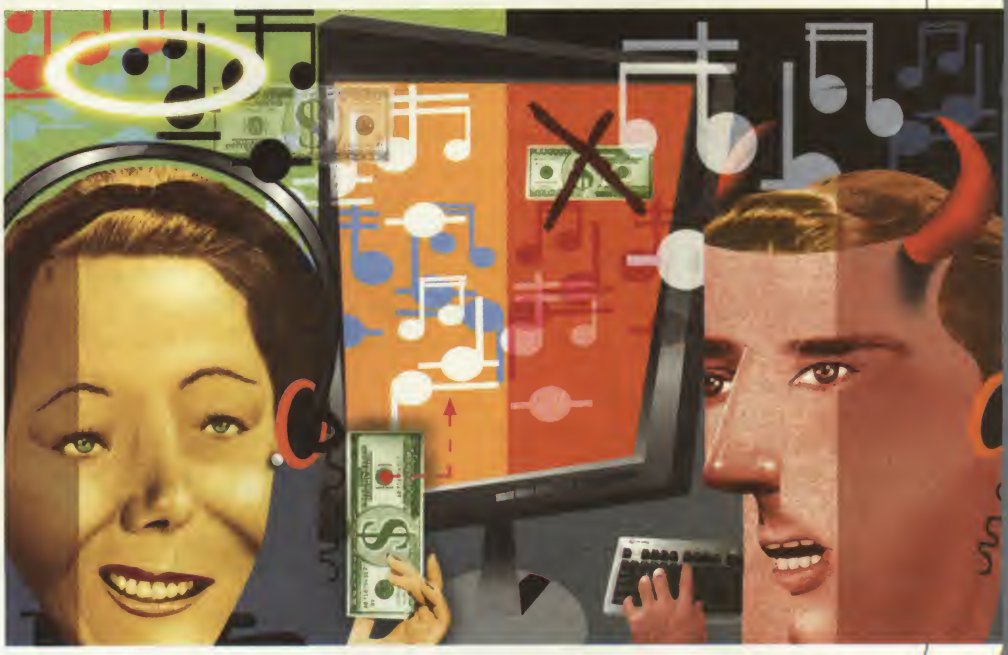


ILLUSTRATION BY WILLIAM RIESER

WebBuyer

SITE REVIEWS FOR ONLINE SHOPPING

BY KEVIN SAVETZ

CONTENTS

Tech Shopping 149
USB Peripherals 151
Batteries and Power 154
Direct PC Vendors 155
Sites for Gamers 156
PC Resources 158
Software Sites 158
Cameras and Photo Equipment 160

<Tech Shopping

aberdeeninc.com

Targeting the savvy consumer who craves speeds and feeds, **Aberdeen** offers extensive specs on a wide variety of computers and accessories.

accessmicro.com

Need a gift for that special someone who has everything? Check out **Access Micro,** which stocks tons of items ranging from T1 routers to complete desktop systems. The help desk and hardware guide provide aid to first-time visitors, and the clearance area offers returned items and old inventory for below wholesale cost.

allstarshop.com

The **Allstar Microelectronics** catalog of PC accessories includes graphics cards, motherboards, and peripherals. The selection in some categories is modest, but prices are reasonable, and you'll see an ample amount of information about each product.

blackbox.com

Get connected! Specializing in network products, **Black Box's** extensive 900-page catalog of storage, cabling, and surge-protection products—plus other connectivity accessories—can be viewed online or off.

buy.com

This monstrous, multifaceted site sells computers, electronics, books, movies, office products, and more. With a whopping 1 million items, **Buy.com** offers a price-matching policy on most of them.

buycase.com

Banish the boring beige box forever! **Colorcase** offers more than 60 unusual computer cases, including translucent-plastic, aluminum, mirrored, and "character" cases. (Be sure to check out the doggy- and kitty-shaped cases.)

buydig.com

A site for shovels and trowels? No, **BuyDig.Com** offers digital tools and gadgets including digital cameras, fax machines, PDAs, DVD players, and video-capture devices.

cablestogo.com

Cables To Go sells every conceivable cable you might need for your PC, from standard SCSI to esoteric system-specific cables. You'll also find networking products, bulk cable, tools, and test equipment. You might even get lucky and snatch up what you need at a bargain price in the site's closeout section.

www.cd-recordable.com

The U.S-owned and -based **CD-Recordable Factory Store** actually manufactures the discs it sells. This easy-to-navigate site stocks a massive variety of CD-R discs, including colorless and tinted media, plus disc-packaging and -storage accessories.

cdw.com

CDW offers an enormous array of hardware and software for business. Create side-by-side comparisons in many product categories, and search out dollar-saving deals on the rebates-and-coupons page.

compgeeks.com

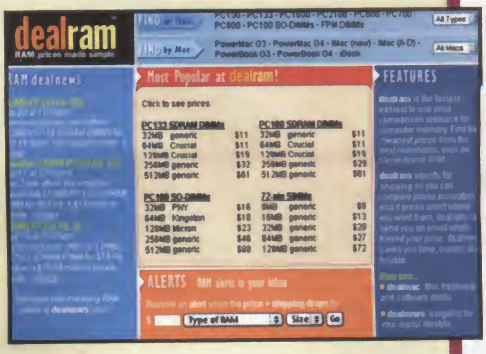
Revenge of the nerds, indeed! Shop the **Computer Geeks Discount Outlet** for new, discontinued, and refurbished computer gear. It's a trove for the do-it-yourselfer piecing together a desktop system. The site features low prices and complete specs on every product.

NOVEMBER

COMPUTER SHOPPER site OF THE month

dealram.com

Given recently plummeting memory prices, it's a great time to give your PC an adrenaline boost by upgrading your system's RAM. Before you buy, try **Dealram,** a new price-comparison search engine from the folks at Dealnews. Just tell the site the type of RAM and the amount of memory you need. It quickly generates a list of online sellers that offer the RAM you require, along with prices so you can make side-by-side comparisons.



Macintosh users can easily choose their models from a list at the site to see prices of compatible memory. PC users don't have it so easy—they'll need to know the type of memory their particular system requires, such as PC133 or FPM DIMMs.

Any frequent online shopper knows a good deal can be sidelined by hefty shipping charges, so Dealram's prices include the estimated cost of shipping. If the RAM a vendor offers is branded, Dealram will tell you its maker but will also offer generic alternatives that usually command lower prices.

Dealram makes one thing crystal clear: It pays to shop around. When we checked, one popular type of RAM module available from several merchants ranged in price from $16 to $65. If the memory you need costs more than you're willing to pay, use the Alerts feature, which will send you an e-mail when your chips fall below a price you set.

SITE REVIEWS

compuplus.com

Comp-U-Plus offers free technical support and a 30-day money-back guarantee on all the peripherals it sells. The catalog isn't exactly earth-shattering in scope, but the prices are reasonable, and plenty of name brands are represented.

Comp-U-Plus

compusa.com

The well-organized **CompUSA** rounds out the usual selection of PC hardware, peripherals, and accessories with areas devoted to electronics and gadgets. The frugal won't want to overlook the site's outlet section.

computergate.com

In business since 1991, **Computer Gate** promises a 30-day satisfaction return policy on its products, which include peripherals and build-to-order PCs. Check out the Quick Index: You'll never have to poke around for the right product again.

computers4sure.com

In the 19 well-stocked departments at **Computers-4Sure.com** you'll find a broad spectrum of products, including networking equipment, projectors, PDAs, and scanners. Bargain hunters can quickly sniff out deals on the Clearance pages.

computershopper.com

Computer Shopper's own piece of cyberspace, **computershopper.com,** provides access to product reviews, interactive guides to choosing a desktop or a notebook, and How to Buy sections for the most popular product categories. The site can also help you find an ISP, ASP, or Web host.

computersurplusoutlet.com

You're just crazy enough to build your own desktop system, aren't you? Then you'll feel right at home at **Computer Surplus Outlet,** where you'll find closeouts, overstocks, refurbished equipment, and liquidation items. You might even stumble on an assembly-required Pentium system for less than $100.

crucial.com

One of the largest providers of memory upgrades on the Web, **Crucial Technology** offers free shipping on RAM for 11,000 computer systems. The company backs its memory with a lifetime warranty.

cyberwarehouse.com

CyberWarehouse deals in refurbished PCs and notebooks from heavy hitters such as Compaq, HP, and IBM. You'll also find a limited selection of peripherals and software. The site's catalog is small, but the discounts are deep.

dalco.com

Dalco Electronics stocks everything from motherboards to monitors. If you're a bargain hunter, start with the specials found on the home page, which change regularly. You'll also find a helpful motherboard/CPU and memory configurator.

dartek.com

With a roster of more than 100,000 products, **Dartek** peddles an impressive selection of hardware, software, networking equipment, and office furniture. Well-designed features include printable spec sheets, customers' product ratings, a product-watch feature, and a frequent-buyers' club.

directron.com

Specializing in computer peripherals, **Directron.com** offers low prices on a wide variety of name-brand and OEM products. Most items include a 30-day guarantee, and any order earns you the right to pick through the Free Stuff bin. Savvy savers will appreciate the Clearance area, as well as frequent-customer and volume-purchasing discounts.

dirtcheapdrives.com

If you can store data on it, this site sells it. **Dirt Cheap Drives** offers hard drives, CD-ROM and DVD hardware, and drive arrays, with detailed technical information about each product. This decade-old company also stocks mounting kits, media, and accessories.

ecost.com

The **eCost.com** catalog spans the full range of PC hardware and software, including ready-to-use systems, peripherals, accessories, and applications. The site features fastidious organization and personalized product recommendations.

egghead.com

Egghead.com shoppers can lose themselves in the site's hardware, software, office-product, and electronics superstores. Corporate users will find volume pricing, leasing information, and software licensing in the business center.

elinux.com

At **eLinux** you'll find a whopping 42,000 hardware and software products. The site is so serious about Linux, many of its desktop and notebook systems don't come bundled with that "other" OS. Special offerings include Linux news and a community forum.

emscomputing.com

EMS Computing offers a 40,000-product catalog, an easy-to-navigate site, and low shipping charges. A monthly newsletter delivers informative tips on choosing and using computer accessories.

www.freecolorprinters.com

It's not a scam—"qualified organizations" can indeed apply for free color printers at **FreeColorPrinters,** a subsidiary of Xerox Corp. You'll need to commit to printing a certain number of pages per month and buy your supplies directly from Xerox. See the site for more details.

fwdepot.com

FireWire Depot serves up IEEE 1394 (FireWire) stuff for your compatible computer. The site's selection includes drives, cases, cables, and IEEE 1394 upgrade cards. The buyer's guide provides insightful answers to frequently asked fiery questions.

harddrive.com

Pack rat? **HardDrive.com** has your storage solution. Choosy shoppers will find extensive choices in IDE, SCSI, and IEEE 1394 (FireWire) drives, along with other peripherals. For fashion-forward computer users, the site offers an array of black PC components, from cases to scanners. After all, black *does* go with everything.

hypermicro.com

Hyper Microsystems specializes in storage. The catalog includes CD-ROM and CD-RW drives, tape backup drives, hard drives, and RAID adapters. Check the Hyper Bundles for ready-to-use RAID and CD-RW starter kits.

iGo

igo.com

iGo calls itself a "mobile technology outfitter." Use the site to outfit your cell phone, laptop, or PDA with chargers, batteries, and other necessary accessories. The iGo Alerts feature delivers free customized news to your portable device.

inkfarm.com

We're not sure what farm printer ink comes from, but we do know that **Inkfarm.com** sells ink and toner with flat-rate shipping. Choose "official" OEM ink or save money with aftermarket ink that often costs about half the price.

insight.com

With more than 110,000 items for sale, **Insight** offers an impressive catalog of hardware and

SITE REVIEWS

software. Customized sites are available for shoppers in the United States, Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

jandr.com

Hardware, software, home-office products, and appliances abound at **J&R Computer World,** the New York City-based superstore famed for its selection and, ahem, "brusque" service. Avoid the attitude with this online version, which specializes in cameras, both digital and traditional film models. Product help is available via e-mail, online chat, and phone.

lanblvd.com

Wrestling with your old router? Network card not working? **LanBlvd.com** specializes in networking products. You'll find hubs, routers, interface cards, and wireless stations, along with other essentials for your LAN.

laptoptravel.com

Laptop Travel is road-warrior heaven! The site sells portable-computing and international-travel gear, including electrical adapters, modem converters/couplers, and security accessories. You'll find traditional and "camouflaged" laptop carrying cases, laptop RAM, and storage add-ons.

linuxcentral.com

Find your alternative at **Linux Central.** The site stocks Linux-friendly hardware, commercial software, and operating-system CD-ROMs. A selection of Linux-compatible T-shirts, hats, and ties will help you flash your alternative tendencies in public.

megahaus.com

MegaHaus' catalog of "everything high-tech" offers a full spectrum of products, from mice to monitors. The site specializes in storage, including hard drives, RAID solutions, and CD recorders.

mei-microcenter.com

MEI-Micro Center offers new and refurbished desktops from Compaq, eMachines, Hewlett-Packard, and PowerSpec. You'll also find a decent selection of peripherals. Rummage through the bargain bin for deals on closeouts, refurbished units, and overstocks.

memman.com

All of the desktop and laptop memory sold at **Memory Man** carries a lifetime warranty, and the site's reference guide offers RAM-configuration info for all brand-name computers.

memory4less.com

Memory4Less.com offers low prices on a wide variety of RAM. If you don't know the memory requirements of your computer or digital camera, the site will help clue you in.

microx-press.com

MicroX-Press offers hardware, software, prebuilt systems, and clearance items, with detailed specs on each. Read the return policy before you order, lest you be stuck with a 15 percent restocking fee.

www.mobile-mania.com

Quickly head to **Mobilemania.com** for digital cameras, e-mail devices, PDAs, cases, and adapters. You'll find the bountiful selection a haven for folks (like you) who are always on the go.

mobileplanet.com

MobilePlanet is home to a gaggle of high-tech tools and toys for mobile professionals. The selection includes notebooks, PDAs, wireless communication products, and travel-size printers and scanners.

mobilizenow.com

On the go? Gear up at **MobilizeNow,** where you'll find the gadgets you need, including GPS receivers, portable radios, and cellular and PDA accessories. Tell the site what country you're headed for, and it will spit out a list of appropriate adapter plugs, phone adapters, and voltage converters.

monitorexpress.com

Monitor Express sells 500 models of new monitors, plus money-saving refurbished ones. The catalog also includes monitor cables, video adapters, and screen filters.

USB Peripherals

allusb.com

AllUSB is a bountiful source of information about the Universal Serial Bus, including product news, reviews, and advice. The cable guide offers information about different types of cabling and tips on using USB cables. The Links page serves up a list of technical, end-user, and industry sites.

usb.org

The official site of the **USB Implementers Forum** provides answers to common questions about everyone's favorite serial bus, discussion groups for developers, and a meticulous list of compatible products.

usbgear.com

Usbgear.com offers a full range of USB peripherals—including joysticks, card readers, and scanners—but specializes in hard drives. The company offers free shipping on orders over $50, but hefty restocking fees will make you think twice before returning a product.

usbmax.com

USBMax stocks an abundance of USB products, from hard drives to video-capture devices. Shoppers will find plenty of information about products, complete with photos of each. The site advertises a 30-day money-back guarantee, but beware the 15 to 25 percent restocking fees.

www.usbstuff.com

USB Stuff offers a vast selection of USB peripherals, adapters, hubs, and cables. You can find plenty of useful and unusual gadgets, but the site is cluttered with links, making navigation difficult.

usbtown.com

You better not pout, because USB is coming to town. **USB Town.com** customers enjoy an extensive selection of USB devices and a liberal return policy. After you've received your gadget, visit the site's driver library to download the latest software for it.

usbworkshop.com

Although it doesn't sell products, **USB Workshop** is a friend to anyone in the market for USB components. You'll find specifications, user ratings, and photos for hundreds of peripherals, cables, and sundry USB-ready contraptions. Explore the lists of most popular and most talked-about products, then zoom in on the peripherals that are compatible with your favorite operating system.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BILL RIESER

SITE REVIEWS

monitoroutlet.com

From inexpensive 14-inchers to elegant and pricey flat-panel LCDs, **Monitor Outlet** proffers a wide range of displays. The site sells units from 24 manufacturers, plus specialty monitors such as touch screens, wide-aspect-ratio units, and projectors.

motherboardexpress.com

Oh, mama. **Motherboard Express** was made for PC-building connoisseurs. Shoppers can filter the selection of 100-plus boards by manufacturer, chipset, processor type, case type, onboard controller, or number of CPUs.

motherboards.com

With a wide selection of motherboards from seven manufacturers, do-it-yourselfers will revel in handpicking the perfect innards for their new PCs at **Motherboards.com.** Order a motherboard and CPU together, and the company will configure and test them for you.

www.mwave.com

In addition to PC systems and peripherals, **Multiwave Direct** stocks notebook accessories, videoconferencing equipment, and network tools. Top sellers, "blowout specials," and rebate forms are a click away from the home page.

neutronet.com

Neutron carries thousands of computer systems and peripherals from nearly 400 manufacturers and distributors. A handy toolbox offers easy access to best buys, help for first-time buyers, and a massive manufacturer directory.

newegg.com

You won't have to shell out big bucks or scramble for hardware at **NewEgg.com**. Peck at the site's listings of new products and top sellers, then take a crack at the specials. Order carefully—the 15 percent restocking fee might make you squawk.

www.notebooksuperstore.com

Devoted exclusively to portable computers, **NotebookSuperStore.com** sells more than 100 different laptop models from nine manufacturers. You'll see technical details about each model, and a comparison tool helps you zero in on the best portable for you.

nxgen.com

Next Generation's Web site is densely packed with prebuilt computers and peripherals ranging from cables to graphics cards. The selection is huge, and the site provides full specs and plenty of details about each product.

1coolpc.com

A cool computer is a happy computer. **1CoolPC** specializes in fans, heat sinks, and other cooling devices for your CPU, graphics card, monitor, hard drive, and other components that tend to swelter.

palmgear.com

Users of handhelds will appreciate the extensive selection of free and commercial programs downloadable from **PalmGear.com.** Shoppers can buy PDA hardware and accessories, including carrying cases and hip styli. Sign up for an e-mailing list to receive information about new software, news, and user tips.

pcconnection.com

PC Connection offers bargains on a colossal variety of PC and Macintosh products. Smart Selectors ease the search process for those looking for turnkey systems, cameras, printers, monitors, or memory to fit specific guidelines.

Batteries and Power

batteriesdirect.com

Empower yourself! **BatteriesDirect** sells batteries for laptops, camcorders, and portable phones, as well as AC adapters for portable computers. If the kids' toys are running on empty, check out the selection of rechargeable nickel metal-hydride batteries in sizes ranging from AAA to D.

www.batterybarn.com

Battery Barn's selection is more shocking than licking a fresh 9-volt. Here you'll find replacement batteries for your watch, electric shaver, radio-controlled toys, and cordless drill. Your gizmos will never be lifeless again.

buyuptime.com

BuyUptime.com's protection and security inventory includes uninterruptible power supplies and accessories, batteries, and power-distribution units. The selection ranges from simple surge protectors to industrial transformers.

ebatts.com

eBatts.com specializes in batteries for laptops, uninterruptible power supplies, camcorders, and cellular and cordless phones. Check out the battery-tips area for info about battery life, maximizing performance, and recycling old batteries.

planetbattery.com

Just choose the make and model of your drained device, and **PlanetBattery.com,** another plentiful source for replacement batteries, will show you what you need. The selection includes batteries for digital cameras, phones, laptops, and UPSs.

powersupersite.com

Need to be on the safe side? **Power SuperSite** offers new, used, and refurbished UPSs—search them by type, price, or power output. The site also sells surge protectors and replacement UPS batteries.

rbrc.org

When the batteries that power your mobile gadgets die, don't throw them out—recycle, recycle, recycle! **Rechargeable Battery Recycling** is a nonprofit organization that (surprise!) promotes the recycling of rechargeable batteries. The site will give you the address of local businesses where you can drop off used batteries and offers helpful tips for consumers on using rechargeable batteries.

SITE REVIEWS

www.pcliquidator.com

The getting's good at **PC Liquidator,** a site that offers clearance, refurbished, and overstocked hardware and software. The inventory is always changing and usually inexpensive. You can find many hardware choices for under $10—and software for 99 cents.

pcmall.com

Shoppers at **PC Mall** receive free lifetime technical support on the site's vast selection of computers, hardware, and software. The site's business-solutions forum offers corporate leasing and volume pricing. Apple-heads can find all their favorite Macintosh products at the **Mac Mall** sister site ***(www.macmall.com)***.

pcnation.com

You'll pledge allegiance to **PCNation** after seeing its catalog of 70,000 hardware, software, and networking products. The home page offers links to "best buys" and to products with special rebates.

pczone.com

PC Zone stocks an impressive selection of all things PC. You'll find links to a clearance area and other stores: **Mac Zone** and **Electronics Zone.** Printable rebate coupons can save you some cash.

provantage.com

Provantage offers PC products from more than 1,000 manufacturers, including a large selection of books and training materials. The site's Personal Tracking List feature lets customers build a list of product bookmarks, then monitor prices and availability.

Sunway Graphics

www.sg3d.com

Sunway Graphics specializes in PC graphics cards, offering a wide selection of powerful 3D accelerators. You'll also see a smaller selection of other graphics products: TV-tuner cards, videoconferencing equipment, and video-capture cards.

shopper.cnet.com

The **CNET Shopper** search engine takes the guesswork out of finding a deal on hardware, software, and accessories. The price-drop-alerts feature will send you e-mail when the cost of a coveted gadget falls. (CNET Networks is *Computer Shopper's* parent company.)

sparco.com

Looking for that something extra? Check out **Sparco.com's** list of products that come bundled with "free stuff." The site stocks more than 130,000 products, and it offers a list of discounted items for students and faculty members of academic institutions.

ssdonline.com

At **State Street Direct,** shoppers will discover a huge selection of computers and imaging products. Digital-camera shoppers will find many items of interest, including customized comparison charts.

staples.com

Yeah, they've got that. **Staples'** Web site offers a liberal price-matching policy on computer accessories, software, and office supplies. If you order similar items often, you can set up personalized shopping lists. The company can occasionally take its time shipping items out to you, though, so beware.

superwarehouse.com

SuperWarehouse.com stocks printers, monitors, hard drives, scanners, digital cameras, and laptops. The site's selection of printers is particularly large, and even includes plotters, dot matrix units, and other special-use printers.

tccomputers.com

In business since 1988, **TC Computers** sells fully configured systems, motherboards, and peripherals. The company's specialty is motherboards; buyers can choose to have motherboards and processors preassembled and tested without paying extra.

tcwo.com

Thompson's Computer Warehouse Outlet offers only a small selection of computer products. You may find only a dozen monitors or four CD-ROM drives, but the prices are fantastic.

techstore.com

TechStore.com offers hardware in dozens of categories and highlights monthly top sellers. The site also sells software, ranging from productivity suites to children's titles.

thenerds.net

With no misgivings about the tech-savvy of its company or customers, **TheNerds.net** offers 60,000 computer products, ranging from cables and connectors to graphics cards, at its fast and friendly site. The liberal 30-day return policy will protect you from getting stuck with the wrong product.

tigerdirect.com

TigerDirect's site offers 40,000 products, including computers from Compaq, Gateway, and IBM. Up for a little adventure? Order a build-it-yourself custom PC kit, and let the fun begin!

triocomputers.com

TrioComputers.com offers an impressive array of computer accessories and configure-your-own PCs. Read the site's 10-step tutorial on building your own PC to see if you're up to the challenge.

True Data Technology

truedataonline.com

True Data Technology stocks an exceptional catalog of motherboards, hard drives, and other upgrades. The site also features communication essentials for businesses, including DSL equipment and telephony products.

warehouse.com

The four "warehouses" under **MicroWarehouse's** roof sell PC hardware, Mac products, datacomm components, and supplies. The site accepts corporate, educational, and government accounts, and offers business leases on several of its products.

Direct PC Vendors

www.alienware.com

Alienware can build you a gamer's dream machine, high-performance workstation, or desktop video system. Cases are available in a rainbow of out-of-this-world colors.

buyabs.com

Exceptional customer support on custom-configured desktop and notebook systems is the goal at **ABS Computer Technologies.** All systems include a 30-day money-back guarantee. Some units are available with Linux preinstalled.

buy-atlas.com

Atlas Micro offers desktop PCs built around Pentium, Celeron, and AMD processors. Buyers can use drop-down menus to create a custom configuration and are protected by a reasonable 30-day return policy.

SITE REVIEWS

compaq.com

Three arms of **Compaq Computer's** site offer computers for everyone. See the Compaq AtHome division ***(athome.compaq.com)*** for home and home-office systems, DirectPlus ***(www.directplus.compaq.com)*** for business PCs and servers, or the Compaq Factory Outlet Superstore ***(www.compaqfactoryoutlet.com)*** for big bargains.

csd.toshiba.com

The Web home for **Toshiba's** stylish portables and desktop systems doesn't offer as many build-to-order options as some other sites, but it's loaded with plenty of extended-warranty and lease options.

cyberpowerinc.com

Each **CyberPower** PC includes a three-year warranty and 30-day money-back guarantee. The site's service area includes downloadable drivers and lifetime tech support.

dell.com

Dell Computer's electronic storefront has always led the way in ease of use. The site is jam-packed with detailed information that makes it a snap to match a machine to your needs. Each system is configurable to the nth degree via drop-down menus, and you can get quick access to online support customized for your PC.

www.fujitsu-pc.com

Fujitsu's site focuses on portable computing, including notebook PCs and pen-based tablet computers. Each computer includes several warranty options. A trade-in program offers cash back on your old computer when you upgrade to certain models.

gateway.com

One of the biggest players in online computer sales, **Gateway** has an enormous and informative site that sells custom-built desktops and portables, delivering them on time 98 percent of the time, according to BizRate.com.

hpshopping.com

At this site, **Hewlett-Packard** sells its lines of desktop and notebook computers, handhelds, PDAs, digital cameras, scanners, and printers. The site makes repeat purchases simple for businesses and individuals.

ibm.com/products

ShopIBM sells business and home PCs, notebooks, servers, thin clients, networking equipment, and peripherals. The build-to-order option allows buyers to customize a new desktop. Linux is an option on laptop models.

idot.com

From low-cost budget models to powerful monster machines, **iDot** offers customized desktop and notebook computers with a good return policy.

microexpress.net

Micro Express offers built-to-order desktop and notebook computers featuring AMD and Intel processors. Each system includes a 30-day guarantee and a two- or four-year warranty. Business leases are available.

micronpc.com

One of the largest direct PC vendors, **MicronPC** sells computers to home-office users, larger businesses, government buyers, and buyers outside the United

Sites for Gamers

crazytree.com

From Dreamcast to Xbox, **CrazyTree.com** has low prices and flat-rate FedEx shipping for the console and PC games you dream about. There's plenty of information about Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) ratings, so you can choose games appropriate for the youngsters.

dragon.ca

Next time you get an itchy trigger finger, visit **Dragon.ca.** The site sells a gaggle of games for the PC and for video-game consoles. Although the games are in Canada, prices are quoted in both U.S. and Canadian dollars, and shipping is very affordable.

ebgames.com

EBgames.com is a game player's paradise, selling new and preowned titles for PCs and every game console under the sun. The site's new EB1 service lets users with broadband Internet access rent PC games online.

gamespot.com

GameSpot's news, previews, and player guides are sure to hit the spot. Download game demos to try something new, then find the best prices with the site's Game Buyer feature. (GameSpot is owned by CNET Networks, *Computer Shopper's* parent company.)

gamestop.com

GameStop.com is an elegant site that offers new and used games for consoles and for your PC. A "build your own bundle" feature makes it easy to piece together your dream system, complete with console, accessories, and games.

tronixweb.com

Do you crave games you just can't get in the United States? In addition to domestic titles, **Tronix** sells Japanese-import software, hardware, and accessories for your favorite video-game consoles.

videogamewarehouse.com

Video Game Warehouse only sells used console video games—perfect when you're looking for last year's game or are shopping on a budget. The site stocks titles for older systems too, including the original PlayStation and Super Nintendo. They'll even buy back your previously played games at competitive prices.

SITE REVIEWS

States. The Factory Outlet offers refurbished and discontinued systems.

www.mwmicro.com

Go MidWest, young man. **MidWest Micro** delivers down-home, custom-configured desktops, servers, and notebook systems. The site's Service Center is exemplary, with a troubleshooting knowledge base and driver downloads that cater to your particular system.

nutrend.com

Custom-configure a home or business desktop PC at **NuTrend Computer Products.** The company stocks machines running your choice of Intel or AMD processors. Each system comes with a three-year warranty.

www.polywell.com/onlinestore

Polywell Computers may not be a household name, but the company offers desktops, workstations, and servers that are worth a look. You'll find massive custom-configuration options.

sagernotebook.com

Specializing in notebook computers, **Sager** offers a variety of options, from budget machines to speedy multimedia units. Service includes a 72-hour repair-turnaround guarantee and lifetime free tech support. Business leases are available.

shopprostar.com

Each computer in **ProStar Computer's** line of notebook PCs is backed by a 30-day money-back guarantee, a speedy-repair promise, and free tech support. The handy comparison tool helps buyers zero in on the best model.

sonystyle.com/vaio

SonyStyle is a sleek-looking site selling Sony's line of VAIO desktops and notebooks, plus digital cameras, displays, and storage devices.

store.apple.com

Apple Computer's well-designed site allows you to custom-configure any Macintosh computer and offers a wide array of Mac-compatible software and accessories. Beware the one-click ordering feature, however—using it may be a bit too convenient for impulse buyers!

unitedmicro.com

Take home a preconfigured Intel- or AMD-based PC, or start with a bare-bones system and let **United Micro** install the components of your choice.

www.winbook.com

Focusing exclusively on portables, **WinBook Computer** offers machines with a 30-day money-back guarantee, a one-year warranty, and free technical support. Ironically, some of the site's best deals, the daily "Web specials," can only be ordered by phone.

<PC Resources

consumerreview.com

ConsumerReview.com helps consumers research products before they buy. The site provides more than 200,000 reviews and ratings for tech gadgets and products for the home, car, and kids.

dcresource.com

The **Digital Camera Resource Page** is an unbiased, comprehensive source of information for digital-camera buyers and owners. Shoppers can glean necessary info from the FAQ page, buyer's guide, message boards, and reviews.

dealnews.com

Deal yourself in! **Dealnews** is a fantastic buyer's guide that reports on low-price specials in Web stores. Updated daily, the site discovers deals that range from tempting to nearly impossible to resist. Check out sister site **Dealmac** for Mac-oriented gotta-haves.

dealtime.com

DealTime.com is an independent comparison-shopping service. The site aggregates prices from hundreds of online merchants, auctions, and classified sites. Also, 21st-century shoppers can compare prices by cell phone or wireless PDA, thanks to the site's mobile service.

56k.com

See **56K.com** for a primer on 56kbps modems, a price shopper for buying a modem at the best price, and downloads of the latest firmware. Read the special report on the new V.92 modems.

gomez.com

Gómez.com offers ratings and customer reviews of e-commerce sites in two dozen categories, ranging from Web-based computer stores to drugstores, apparel vendors to online brokers. Check the ratings on ease of use, customer confidence, and cost.

hardwarereincarnation.com

Let your laptop live again! **Hardware Reincarnation** is a guide to repairing and upgrading laptop computers. The site includes a database of LCD screens—find out which laptops' displays are compatible. You'll also find upgrade tips and a guide to laptop repair.

www.linhardware.com

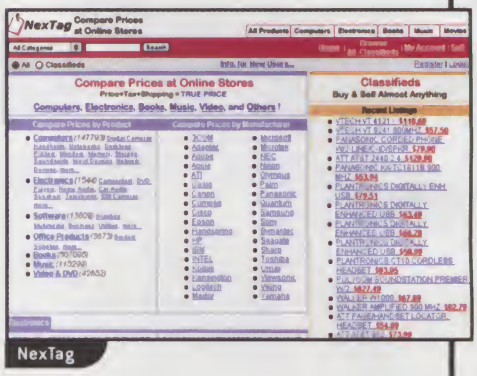
Will that sleek new laptop run Linux? Find out with the **ZDNet Linux Hardware Database,** where users share their experiences regarding which hardware's compatible with Linux—and which isn't. For the stuff that is, download the appropriate driver and put it to work. (ZDNet is owned by CNET Networks, *Computer Shopper's* parent company.)

motherboards.org

Motherboards.org is packed with motherboard news, reviews, specifications, and tips. Its comprehensive database of 1,400 products includes driver information, technical details, and overclocking hints.

nextag.com

NexTag is a sophisticated buying service that can help frugal shoppers find the lowest possible prices on computer equipment, electronics, books, music, and videos. Entering your ZIP code allows NexTag to calculate shipping and tax for accurate pricing.



NexTag

pdastreet.com

No matter which PDA you use, there's something for you at **PDAStreet.com.** This multifaceted site delivers reviews, software downloads, user tips, and classified ads for Windows CE, Palm, Visor, Psion, and RIM users.

resellerratings.com

Want a second opinion before you share your credit-card number with an unfamiliar online merchant? Check **ResellerRatings.com,** which provides customer evaluations of 1,900 online hardware vendors. Take reviews with a grain of salt: We've seen dozens of negative messages posted by one (very unhappy) person.

<Software Sites

beyond.com

Beyond.com presents software for PC, Mac, and PDA users. In addition to traditional boxed titles, the site sells downloadable software from major publishers and a respectable selection of computer hardware. (CNET Networks, *Computer Shopper's* parent company, is an investor in Beyond.com.)

buypcsoft.com

Buypcsoft.com offers software for Windows PCs in categories from business management to voice recognition. It's an efficient site with a good selection and high ratings among previous and current customers.

SITE REVIEWS

chumbo.com

In addition to tons of Windows programs and DVD movies, **Chumbo.com** features PDA software and a Linux Store that sells applications for the popular alternative OS.

compuexpert.com

If you crave games for your Mac or PC, stop by **Compuexpert.com.** The categories include racing simulations, sports games, strategy games, and adventure titles. Colorful descriptions and screenshots are given for most titles.

cws.internet.com

Stroud's Consummate Winsock Applications List is the ultimate one-stop download site for Internet software, including Web-development tools, browsers, and chat clients. You'll find comprehensive file lists, ratings, and extensive reviews. A free newsletter provides summaries of new software releases

Cameras and Photo Equipment

abbeycamera.com

Abbey Camera's catalog of more than 10,000 cameras and accessories will impress even veteran photographers. The options range from 35mm cameras to medium- and large-format models, darkroom supplies, and professional gear.

cameraworld.com

Cameraworld.com has been in business for 25 years. In addition to a 7,000-product catalog including digital and traditional cameras, lenses, and accessories, the site hosts dozens of informative articles on photography, making digital pictures, and camcorders.

focuscamera.com

You could spend all day browsing around **Focuscamera.com.** The catalog of optics products includes cameras, scanners, camcorders, and telescopes. The Service Center includes convenient tools like a nifty battery finder and a rebate center.

keh.com

Shop for new and used photo equipment at **Keh.com,** the online arm of 21-year-old KEH Camera Brokers. The company offers a liberal two-week return policy on all preowned equipment. It buys and trades camera gear, too: Use the online quote wizard to find out the value of your old photography stuff.

www.netphotostore.com

Unique Photo offers products for every photographer, whether you prefer digital or darkroom. The 10,000-product catalog includes 35mm and digital cameras, as well as medium- and large-format cameras for serious shutterbugs.

www.normancamera.com

Shoppers at **Norman Camera & Video Online** have the benefit of knowing exactly what they're getting. The site serves up comprehensive specifications for each product. In addition to film and digital cameras, Norman stocks digital photo printers, video cameras, and a huge selection of camera bags.

photoalley.com

When you visit **PhotoAlley.com,** make sure you have time for both shopping and learning. The site offers more than 500 articles full of shutterbug secrets, hundreds of product reviews, and a photo-tips newsletter. In the Community area, you'll find out how to send your pictures to the "photo feedback" forum for brutally honest critiques.

ritzcamera.com

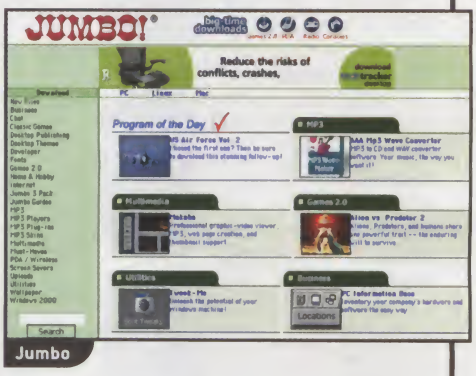
The selection at **RitzCamera.com** includes single-use, underwater, Polaroid, even children's cameras. Use the comparison tool to create customized evaluation charts for point-and-shoot, SLR, and digital cameras, or for camcorders.

download.cnet.com

CNET Download.com will help you find shareware and free software, linking to thousands of PC, Mac, Linux, and PDA titles. Well-written newsletters and down-to-earth reviews help you to locate the perfect program. (CNET Networks is *Computer Shopper's* parent company.)

handango.com

Handango offers thousands of commercial software downloads for Palm OS, Pocket PC, Windows CE, and RIM handhelds. Newbies can start with the site's tutorials and recommendations for first-time buyers.



jumbo.com

Jumbo is a fitting name for this monstrous file archive, featuring programs for sale, demos, shareware, and freeware. Jumbo Guides offer articles on backing up, sharing MP3s, and other computing topics.

999central.com

The price is right at **999central.com,** which stocks 100 software and DVD titles, each for $5—shipping included. Educational, entertainment, and lifestyle applications are the most common.

softwareoutlet.com

Calling all cheapskates! Come check it out. **Software-Outlet.com's** a veritable virtual bargain bin. You'll find dirt-cheap apps—older versions, titles from defunct companies, or just plain funky stuff.

www.tucows.com

It's not just bovine bliss: **Tucows** is also an incredible archive of freeware and shareware. Plenty of local mirror sites keep the download process speedy. The category list and reviews make finding the software you seek a breeze.

zdnet.com/downloads

You'll need more bandwidth. Download shareware, freeware, and demos from **ZDNet Downloads.** The site offers daily software highlights and quick links to the week's most popular software. Every program is rated, reviewed, and checked for viruses, so your new software won't come with any unpleasant surprises. (ZDNet is owned by CNET Networks, *Computer Shopper's* parent company.) ▼